

FORT BATTLEFORD NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK

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Published under the authority of
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Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

ROGER DUHAMEL, F.R.S.C.
Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, Ottawa, 1968

CH
IA 71
- 2044

Fort Battleford was one of the five original North-West Mounted Police posts established in the 1870's in what was then the North-West Territories. Of the others—Forts Walsh, Macleod, Calgary and Saskatchewan—only Fort Walsh has been preserved in authentic form.

Establishment of the post coincided with the negotiation of Treaty No. 6 with the various bands of Plains and Wood Crees who lived in the country along the North Saskatchewan River. Superintendent James Walker of the N.W.M.P. founded Fort Battleford in August, 1876, and provided the armed escort for the commission which negotiated the Indian treaty.

A year after Fort Battleford was founded, the small trading settlement of Battleford became the seat of the North-West territorial government. The presence of federal Department of Public Works officials engaged in providing quarters and offices for the government led to the construction of a two-storey residence for the fort's commanding officer. This house



Entrance to Fort Battleford, showing a section of the stockade and the bastion.

is still preserved at Fort Battleford National History Park and today, as in 1877, is still the most imposing building of the fort.

The duties of the small force of police at Fort Battleford centered around the administration of Indian affairs and the maintenance of law and order in the huge area of Saskatchewan that lay between Duck Lake in the east and Fort Saskatchewan in the west. Walker acted as Indian Agent for the Indians who had agreed to Treaty No. 6 and with his force which, in 1877, numbered only 13 all ranks, he looked after the annual payments of treaty money. Sub-posts under the command of Walker were manned at Duck Lake and Fort Carlton to keep close watch on the activities of the Crees and Metis in the area.

The most troublesome of Walker's charges was the band of Duck Lake Crees under Chief Beardy who had held out from signing Treaty No. 6 in 1876. Although Beardy had later signed a treaty, he was a constant complainer, arguing that his band was entitled to more benefits than the others who had signed Treaty No. 6. The roaming bands of Big Bear, another hold-out from any treaty with the Queen, also worried the Saskatchewan settlers whenever they were in the district. A third group of Indians, non-Canadian Sioux who had taken refuge in Canada to avoid reprisals for the Minnesota Massacres of 1862, drifted through the Saskatchewan country. Homeless, demoralized, and often starving, these Sioux tried to support themselves by hunting buffalo but when game was scarce, they accepted odd jobs of work from the settlers.

This unstable mixture of treaty and non-treaty Canadian Indians, wandering Sioux refugees, and dissident Metis, whose discontent was stirred by the precarious supply of buffalo, created a threatening situation in the Saskatchewan District. Walker, well aware of the deficiencies of Fort Battleford and his small force, recommended that suitable quarters be built for his men. Three years after establishment, the fort was still little more than a primitive log barracks, with leaky roofs and walls which the winter cold penetrated. Even Walker's quarters were uncomfortable, so much so that on a winter morning in 1879, with the temperature at 37 below, he found ice on top of his bedroom stove.

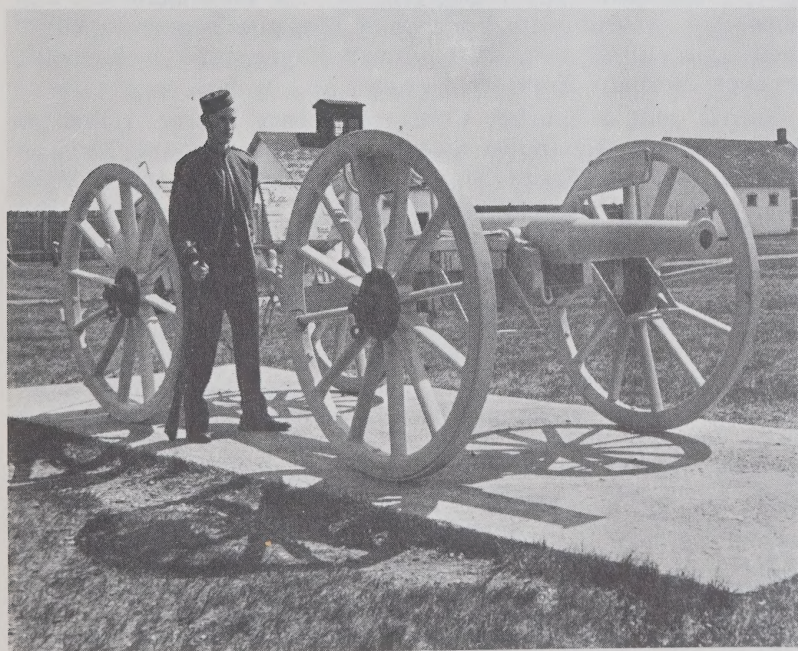
Walker hoped that a full troop of officers and men would be provided for his establishment, thus enabling him to carry out police duties more effectively and improve Fort Battleford. However, he was forced to distribute two officers and 28 N.C.O.'s and constables between Battleford, Prince Albert

and Duck Lake, operate a large farming operation at Battleford, cut fuelwood for the winter and hay for the horses, and try to fortify the post by a wooden stockade.

In 1880, in accordance with the N.W.M.P. policy of rotating officers every two years, Walker was transferred to the command of Fort Walsh. His successor at Battleford was Superintendent W. M. Herchmer. Herchmer completely overhauled the barracks and stables of the post, completed the stockade and received permission to build bastions at the corners of the fort. The sub-post at Duck Lake was closed and better premises provided for the sub-detachment at Prince Albert.

In 1884, a large storehouse, another barracks, a hospital, a stable, and an underground magazine were added to Fort Battleford. The older buildings were repaired and a deep well sunk. A new detachment was set up at Fort Carlton in former trading post buildings.

In March, 1885, "D" Division of the N.W.M.P.—a force of 200 men distributed between the headquarters at Fort Battleford and the sub-posts of Fort Carlton, Fort Pitt, Prince Albert and Frog Lake—faced its most severe test. The Saskatchewan Metis under Louis Riel, in alliance with the Indians, had



A seven-pounder artillery piece with limber is displayed within the fort.

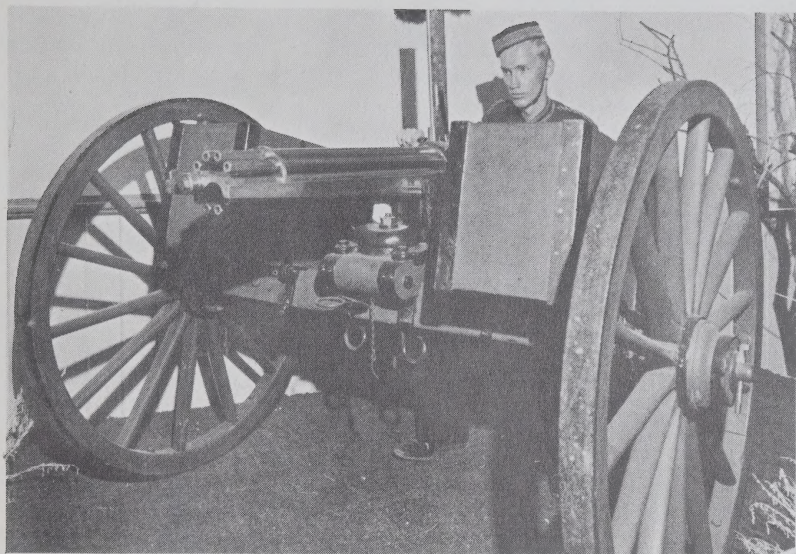
rebelled against government authority in the Northwest Territories.

Superintendent L. N. F. Crozier, commanding at Fort Battleford, expected the first blow to fall on the outpost of Fort Carlton, which was in the heart of the Metis country. He therefore reinforced the post with about 50 men, mostly settlers from Prince Albert who had volunteered to help defend their settlement from the Indians and Metis. At Duck Lake on March 26, Crozier's force was defeated by a large party of Metis and Indians commanded by Gabriel Dumont, receiving 23 casualties and losing a 7-pounder field gun. Fort Carlton was abandoned and the police and volunteers withdrew to Prince Albert.

At Fort Battleford, Inspector W. S. Morris was left with 40 men to protect the lives and property of about 400 families. The victory at Duck Lake had impressed the Indians with their power to correct their grievances and improve their situation by force of arms. Settlers, with their wives and children, abandoned their homes and took refuge in the police fort. On March 30, Crees and Stoneys from eight nearby reserves gathered around the deserted buildings on the south side of the Battle River and pillaged the settlement. On the same day, Assiniboines from Chief Mosquito's reserve killed their agricultural instructor, James Payne, and a bachelor rancher, Bernard Tremont.

Morris sent a courier, Constable Henry Storer, riding to Swift Current, 150 miles away, for reinforcements. He was accompanied by Frank Smart, an independent trader who volunteered to ride with the N.W.M.P. constable. While the worried settlers at Fort Battleford awaited attack, Inspector Morris put his police and all able-bodied men to work on strengthening the stockade. An earthen embankment was placed against the stockade on the inside and loopholes with sandbags to protect the riflemen placed at intervals. Two substantial bastions were erected, one at the south-east corner, the other at the north-west, and trenches built around them. The lone artillery piece, a 7-pounder, was emplaced and foraging parties searched the ruined buildings on the south bank, recovering a satisfactory quantity of food and tobacco.

Meanwhile a relief column of troops, commanded by Lieut.-Col. W. D. Otter, was marching to the relief of Battleford. It consisted of 46 Mounted Police commanded by the former Fort Battleford commander, Superintendent Herchmer; the Queen's Own Rifles of Toronto; the Governor General's Footguards of Ottawa; and a battery of artillery, regulars formed



The Gatling gun is on exhibit in the museum.

from the School of Gunnery at Toronto. This column reached Battleford on April 24, forestalling the Indians laying siege to the fort. Despite the anxiety of the settlers and the police, it is extremely unlikely the Indians had considered making a direct attack against a fort defended by a force of well-armed men.

After their depredations in "old Battleford" at the end of March, many Indians had returned to their own reserves but a number of unruly Crees and Assiniboinés had joined the Crees on Chief Poundmaker's reserve at Cut Knife Creek, 38 miles west of Battleford. There they lived off their plunder, waiting to see whether events would make it worthwhile for them to join openly in the Metis rebellion. Their host, Chief Poundmaker, had not decided to take up arms in the rebellion and held his own band in check but he had no control over the Indians from other reserves who had moved into his camp.

Col. Otter, commander of the force which had relieved Battleford, decided to intimidate the Indians on the Cut Knife reserve and on May 1st led a column of more than 300 troops and police to the Cree encampment. Far from being intimidated by this show of arms, Poundmaker's men fought back and defeated Col. Otter at the Battle of Cut Knife Creek. Otter lost eight men and brought 14 wounded back on the retreat

to Battleford; his force could easily have been wiped out during the withdrawal but Poundmaker, satisfied that he had defended his camp from attack, held his warriors back from pursuing the defeated soldiers.

However reluctant he was to engage in hostilities, Chief Poundmaker knew after the Battle of Cut Knife Creek that he could not remain neutral. In the face of repeated pleas for support from the Metis, he finally moved eastward towards the Metis headquarters at Batoche. But before he linked up with the Metis, the North-West Rebellion had ended with the defeat of the rebels at the Battle of Batoche. Poundmaker decided to surrender and on May 26, at Battleford, he handed over his arms, the two Assiniboines who had murdered Payne and Tremont on March 30, himself, and three other Crees to General Frederick D. Middleton. Poundmaker was sentenced to three years' imprisonment after trial at Regina in August and in the fall, trials at Battleford led to the execution of the two Assiniboine murderers and penitentiary sentences for the three Crees from Poundmaker's band.

After the rebellion, Fort Battleford was re-built and improved. Over the years, the original log buildings disappeared one by one, the last, a stable, being destroyed by fire in 1903. By 1924, the fort had become obsolete and unnecessary to police requirements and it was closed. In 1951, due to the interest of North Battleford citizens, the former N.W.M.P. fort was established as a National Historic Park and five of its buildings preserved as a memorial to the Mounted Police.

These five buildings are:

The Commanding Officer's Residence: Constructed 1877. Its rooms contain articles and photographs on the history of the North West Mounted Police, and those who served at Fort Battleford.

The Officers' Quarters: Constructed 1886. Furnishings of the rooms contain articles and photographs on the history of the pioneer days, the coming of the first territorial press, and the North West Territorial Council.

The Sick Horse Stable: Constructed 1898.

The Guard-Room: Constructed 1886. Displays on North West Rebellion.

The Mess-Hall and Kitchen: Constructed 1886. As the strength of the post diminished, this building eventually served as living quarters for the men and non-commissioned officers, kitchen and cook's quarters, and mess-hall. Part of it now serves as a lecture room for visiting school children, the remainder housing exhibits on the Plains Indians.